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# **Jehovah's Witnesses**

**in the  
Mauthausen  
Concentration  
Camp**

**Resistance  
on the Basis of  
Religious Conviction**



**Jehovah's Witnesses in the Mauthausen concentration camp  
– May 1945**

**The religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses became a victim of the cruel machinery of persecution established by the Nazi regime. Thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses – both men and women – were jailed and sent to concentration camps. About 460 Jehovah's Witnesses from all over Europe were interned in the Mauthausen concentration camp and its subcamps. Their living and prison conditions along with the ways they survived and put up resistance in the camp have been reappraised based on documents and accounts of former prisoners. Selected biographies provide a more detailed picture of the life and persecution of the Bible Students who tragically ended up in detention in Mauthausen.**

Heide Gsell and Timon Jakli

# **Jehovah's Witnesses in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp**

## **Resistance on the Basis of Religious Conviction**

*“Jehovah's Witnesses in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp were a community of suffering displaying a strong cohesion. They were modest, disciplined, diligent and patient people who were loyally devoted to their Bible Students Association and hence also to their beliefs. They remained strictly neutral in the illegal political disputes in the camp, they did not cooperate politically, they refused to participate in activities in opposition to the SS, and above all, none of them intended to flee from the camp.”*

Hans Maršalek

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>1.1 State of Research</b> .....	4
<b>1.2 Reasons for the Persecution</b> .....	5
1.2.1 Attitude Towards the State and Society .....	6
1.2.2 Forms of Resistance .....	7
<b>2. Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp</b> .....	9
<b>2.1 Ways to Mauthausen</b> .....	9
<b>2.2 Living Conditions</b> .....	12
2.2.1 Accommodation and Clothing .....	13
2.2.2 Food .....	15
2.2.3 Work Assignment .....	15
2.2.4 Improved Working Conditions .....	16
<b>2.3 Forms of Resistance and Survival Strategies</b> .....	18
2.3.1 Refusal to Sign a Declaration Renouncing Their Faith .....	18
2.3.2 Refusal to Sign the Draft Card .....	20
2.3.3 Refusal to Perform Work in the Armament Industry .....	21
2.3.4 Religious Activities in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp .....	22
2.3.5 Solidarity in the Camp .....	26
<b>2.4 Liberation</b> .....	28

<b>3. Concluding Remarks</b> .....	33
<b>4. Prisoners' Biographies</b> .....	35
4.1 Anton Spießberger .....	35
4.2 August Kraft .....	37
4.3 Heinrich Lutterbach .....	39
4.4 Hedwig Tessarzik .....	41
4.5 Ottilie Weber .....	42
<b>Sources</b> .....	44
<b>Picture Credits</b> .....	44
<b>Literature</b> .....	44
<b>Bibliography on Jehovah's Witnesses in Mauthausen</b> .....	45
<b>Ebensee</b> .....	46
<b>Schloss Lannach</b> [belonging to the Mittersill subcamp] .....	46
<b>St. Lambrecht</b> [subcamp of Ravensbrück, as of 1944 of Mauthausen] .....	47
<b>Life Stories and Case Studies of Prisoners</b> .....	48
<b>Changes compared to the original German version from 2009</b> .....	48

# 1. Introduction

The introductory quotation from Hans Maršalek, a former camp clerk at the Mauthausen concentration camp and pioneer in the area of research on Mauthausen, sheds light on the special way in which those Jehovah's Witnesses who were detained in the concentration camp were perceived by their fellow prisoners. Not only did this group of prisoners differ from others by their inmate identification badge – “the purple triangle” – but also by how they lived according to their faith and showed strong solidarity to one another. This essay deals with the Earnest Bible Students, as the group of prisoners was also called at that time, incarcerated in the Mauthausen concentration camp. A general overview of the state of research opens the paper. This is followed by the reasons why the Nazi regime persecuted the Witnesses and their manner of resistance. Then, closely related, their understanding of the state and the society will be touched on. The main part focuses on the life Jehovah's Witnesses led in Mauthausen CC and its subcamps. Biographical sketches will shed light on the living conditions (special work assignments and how they were treated), the forms of resistance (especially religious activities) and their relationship to other groups of victims in the camp.

## 1.1 State of Research

The history of the Christian religious community of Bible Students or Jehovah's Witnesses, a group who was defamed as a sect in the Nazi era and still is today, and their resistance in concentration camps has already been the subject of numerous publications. There are especially many overall presentations dealing with this group of victims in the Ravensbrück, Dachau and Neuengamme concentration camps.<sup>1</sup> As to the history of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mauthausen, the earliest reference to Jehovah's Witnesses as a group of victims is found in the recollections of former CC inmates, for instance in Erwin Gostner's *1000 Tage im KZ* [1,000 Days in the Concentration Camp]. There are also similar reports of other concentration camps which show how fellow inmates perceived Jehovah's Witnesses as a very cohesive and distinctive group of victims.

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1 Cf. Hesse/Harder, *Und wenn ich lebenslang* [And Even if it's for the Rest of My Life]; Klein, *Jehovas Zeugen im KZ Dachau* [Jehovah's Witnesses in the Dachau Concentration Camp]; Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium* [Between Resistance and Martyrdom].

In the 1970s, more and more overall presentations of Jehovah's Witnesses appeared which described the group of victims and their status in the Mauthausen CC. One example is Evelyn Le Chêne's book *Mauthausen* published in 1971. Hans Maršalek's book, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen* [The History of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp], which first appeared in 1974, is still the standard reference work when it comes to male prisoners and it provides more detailed information concerning Jehovah's Witnesses in the main camp. In recent years, the fate met by female Jehovah's Witnesses increasingly became the center of research. Andreas Baumgartner carried out pioneering work with his study *Die vergessenen Frauen von Mauthausen* [The Forgotten Women of Mauthausen]. Different research works examined details of the subcamps St. Lambrecht (Anita Farkas), Schloss Mittersill and Schloss Lannach (Heimo Halbrainer, Bertrand Perz). In 2006, reports about Schloss Lannach, which used to be a subcamp of the Mauthausen CC and is now owned by former minister Bartenstein, attracted much media attention. Bartenstein subsequently had a study carried out which was published in the fall of 2008 under the title *Schloss Lannach* [Lannach Castle]. Only female Jehovah's Witnesses, transferred there from Ravensbrück CC, performed forced labor in this subcamp.

Other articles in this context have appeared in the Ebensee Memorial's specialist journal *betrifft: Widerstand* [Regarding: Resistance], such as a published article by Justyna Haas. So far, no comprehensive general account of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Mauthausen CC has been assembled, which sheds light both on the group of victims as a whole and also on the fate met by individual Jehovah's Witnesses in Mauthausen.

## **1.2 Reasons for the Persecution**

Why should a relatively small and unimportant religious minority have met with such extremely severe persecution? This calls for further explanation. Hence the most important reasons why Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted under National Socialism will now be uncovered. The basic differences between the religious community and the totalitarian Nazi regime were a strong factor determining the Witnesses' behavior and their position in the camp.

### 1.2.1 Attitude Towards the State and Society

It is part of their religious self-image that Jehovah's Witnesses abide by the laws of the state, live up to their civic duties and show respect towards state authorities. They see themselves as apolitical<sup>2</sup> and therefore do not participate in anti-government activities, demonstrations or conspiracies. However, they are also bound to Christian commandments such as love of neighbor and their conscience which is shaped by Bible principles. They regard Jehovah God to be the highest judge and legislator. They are guided by the statement made by Jesus, "Pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God" (Mark 12:17). Should a conflict arise in this context, they follow the example given by the first-century Christians, who, when facing persecution, kept to their motto: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The history of Jehovah's Witnesses in the 20th century shows that this attitude has repeatedly led to acts of resistance and persecution, especially under totalitarian regimes (in Austria also under the corporate state<sup>3</sup>).

The main lines of conflict between the Nazi state and Jehovah's Witnesses proved to be their refusal to accept the Nazi claim of salvation, their international character, which the rulers of the Nazi regime perceived as a threat (the Bible Students were believed to be part of an American-Jewish-Communist conspiracy), and their clear apolitical attitude, based on their interpretation of John 17:16, which did not allow for complete obedience to state power (Acts 4:18-20; Acts 5:27-29). With the beginning of the war, their strict adherence to the prohibition of killing anyone (Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:43-44) and thus their refusal to take part in the war in any manner, became the main issue of conflict.<sup>4</sup>

Because Jehovah's Witnesses identified the "superior authorities" mentioned in Romans 13:1-7 to be God and Jesus Christ at that time, they reacted toward the totalitarian claim of the Nazi regime with a restrictive course of religious resistance and continued their evangelization work in spite of ban and persecution.<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Neugebauer commented:

*"By no means could a Bible Student who had made a vow to Jehovah fulfill the civic duties the Nazi state demanded from him as a member of the German community."<sup>6</sup>*

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2 Cf. Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*, 92-93, 95; Moos, *Recht und Gerechtigkeit* [Law and Justice], 43, on the other hand, emphasizes the political character of acts of resistance.

3 Cf. *Yearbook 1998*, 91-97; Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*, in: *Jehovas Zeugen* [Jehovah's Witnesses], 14.

4 Cf. *Karner/Gsell/Lesiak, Schloss Lannach* [Lannach Castle], 145.

5 For more insight into how Jehovah's Witnesses understood this verse, see Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*, 55-56.

6 Neugebauer, "Ernste Bibelforscher" ["Earnest Bible Students"], 161.

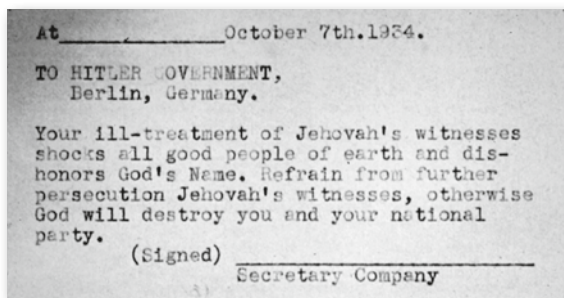
## 1.2.2 Forms of Resistance

Right from the start, Jehovah's Witnesses put up non-violent resistance against the Nazi regime. They refused to participate in any form of worship of the Führer (e.g., the Hitler salute) and rejected nationalism and racial fanaticism. They organized their underground activities similar to political resistance groups.<sup>7</sup> Despite a ban on their meetings (any kind of gathering – even in a private context – was forbidden in Austria as of 1935), they continued getting together for religious purposes in private homes or traveled to conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses in Lucerne (1936) or in Prague (1937).

Brothers and sisters in the faith who suffered from reprisals were supported with collected monetary donations.<sup>8</sup> Publications such as the Watchtower were smuggled into the country (mainly from Switzerland, sometimes also from Czechia or Italy), they were copied in illegal printeries and then distributed by means of an organized system of couriers. Since the mid-1930s, the German and international publications printed eyewitness reports on the atrocities and the circumstances in the concentration camps.<sup>9</sup>

A letter of protest written by J. F. Rutherford (1869-1942), the second president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, condemned the unjustified persecution of the religious community in Germany. From 7 to 9 September 1934, thousands of telegrams were written to Hitler coming from various countries in Europe, America and Canada. They all read:

*"Your ill-treatment of Jehovah's witnesses shocks all good people of earth and dishonors God's Name. Refrain from further persecution [of] Jehovah's witnesses, otherwise God will destroy you and your national party."*



Rutherford's telegram to Hitler

7 Cf. Garbe, Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium, 250 footnote.

8 Cf. Farkas, Geschichte(n) ins Leben holen [Bringing History to Life], 46.

9 Cf. Neugebauer, "Ernste Bibelforscher," 164-178.

In the following years, campaigns to distribute flyers were repeatedly organized. On 12 December 1936 (200,000 copies of the so-called “Luzerner Resolution“ [Resolution of Lucerne]) and on 20 June 1937 (“Offener Brief” [Open Letter]), for instance, flyers were placed in mailboxes or under people’s doors or on park benches in many different places in Germany simultaneously and within a very short period of time.<sup>10</sup>

The persecution reached its climax with the beginning of the war. Every single Witness of Jehovah was now in conflict with the Nazi regime because they opposed the complete militarization of society. While the first conscientious objectors to military service<sup>11</sup> were brought to the Reich Military Court in Berlin and many of them were executed, there was a wide array of activities marking opposition and resistance: the distribution of farewell letters of executed conscientious objectors, the refusal to donate to charities, statements directed against the war, or to perform work in factories producing weapons or in industries related to armament. As the war continued, Jehovah’s Witnesses were treated more and more harshly by the judicial system and the SS. Anita Farkas summarizes the stance Jehovah’s Witnesses took toward the Nazi regime as follows:

*“Even if the Bible Students were not motivated to take a course of opposition by an anti-fascist or democratic attitude, their behavior was certainly in harmony with humanitarian ideas and Christian values.”<sup>12</sup>*

Their steadfastness was a religiously motivated resistance to the demands of the Nazi regime, a necessity stemming from their spiritual self-assertion.

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10 A hand-copied flyer produced by a Bible Student even landed in the mailbox of Mr. Huber, the renowned boss of the Viennese Gestapo. Cf. Neugebauer, “Ernste Bibelforscher” 174.

11 Jehovah’s Witnesses constituted the largest group of conscientious objectors. Cf. Manoschek (ed.), *Opfer der Militärjustiz* [Victims of Military Justice], 7.

12 Farkas, *Geschichte(n) ins Leben holen*, 45. – For a detailed analysis of how Jehovah’s Witnesses fit into the discussion concerning resistance, cf. Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*, 514-542, especially 538-542.

## 2. Jehovah's Witnesses in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp

Jehovah's Witnesses were among the first prisoners in the concentration camps. As of 1937, they were – due to their large number – the only religious group to receive their own inmate identification badge, “the purple triangle.” Until 1942, they were treated especially mercilessly. On their admittance to a concentration camp, they were generally first put in a penal company and isolated from other prisoners. Especially in the initial phase they were a large group in the Mauthausen concentration camp as well, as will now be examined more closely.

### 2.1 Ways to Mauthausen

From 1938 until 1945, Jehovah's Witnesses could be found in the main camp as well as in almost all subcamps of the Mauthausen concentration camp. A special mention goes to the three women's concentration camps in St. Lambrecht, Schloss Mittersill and Schloss Lannach, in which exclusively female Jehovah's Witnesses were detained. All of these female prisoners had previously been in the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp and were selected especially for these relatively small subcamps.<sup>13</sup>

According to Hans Maršálek,

*“from August 1938 until 8 May 1939, mainly Bible Students and also Gypsies [were detained in Mauthausen] for reasons of ‘prevention’ besides prisoners who had been previously convicted for criminal acts and individual ‘asocial persons.’”<sup>14</sup>*

Due to the temporary dissolution of the Dachau concentration camp on 29 September 1939, 144 Jehovah's Witnesses were moved to Mauthausen in the largest closed transportation of detainees to the camp. Some of these prisoners, consisting mainly of German and Austrian Jehovah's Witnesses, had already been interned in Dachau since 1935.<sup>15</sup> All of them had been assigned to the penal company, the so-called “Isolation,” and were isolated from other prisoners in

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<sup>13</sup> A detailed description of the female Bible Students in St. Lambrecht and Lannach can be found in Farkas, *Geschichte(n) ins Leben holen*, and in Karner/Gsell/Lesiak, *Schloss Lannach*.

<sup>14</sup> Maršálek, *Mauthausen*, 137.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Maršálek, *Mauthausen*, 138.

blocks 15, 17 and 19. Other detainees were forbidden to speak to them. Moreover, there was also a ban on writing, reading and going to the canteen. On top of that, they were demanded to perform the hardest forced labor, especially in the construction of roads and buildings and in the “gravel pit”, an assignment that was especially feared. Actually, all Jehovah’s Witnesses were meant to be killed, as the report of Erich Kunz, a Witness of Jehovah, discloses:

*“The outbreak of the Second World War again put us in an unusual situation. Some brothers, who were carpenters by trade, were ordered to erect a backstop in the detention yard of the Dachau concentration camp. 144 plain and simple coffins were produced and made available in the carpenter’s workshop of the camp. The lives of the 144 Bible Students interned at Dachau at that time were not worth a penny. It seemed a done deal that we conscientious objectors, now that the war had broken out, had lost the right to live. Inexplicably, however, the radio message expected from Berlin, which was to confirm this fact, never materialized.”<sup>16</sup>*

In 1941/1942, within the context of Action “14f13,” prisoners who were incapacitated for work, sick, or otherwise undesirable were transported from the Dachau and Mauthausen concentration camps to Schloss Hartheim to be gassed. The destination specified for the so-called “Invalid Transports” was cynically called “convalescent camp” or “sanatorium”.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of 1942, a total of 26 – mainly Austrian and German – Jehovah’s Witnesses were brought from the Dachau concentration camp directly to Hartheim, where they were generally gassed immediately on arrival.

Usually, prisoners arriving from other concentration camps were first put in quarantine in the main camp. From there, they were possibly transported to other subcamps. In certain cases, the prisoners were taken straight to the subcamps.<sup>18</sup>

Toward the end of the war, at the beginning of 1945, another larger group of female Jehovah’s Witnesses was brought from Gross-Rosen to Mauthausen with the so-called “Evacuation Transports”.

According to the current state of research done by the Historical Archives of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Austria, there were approximately 460 Jehovah’s Witnesses,

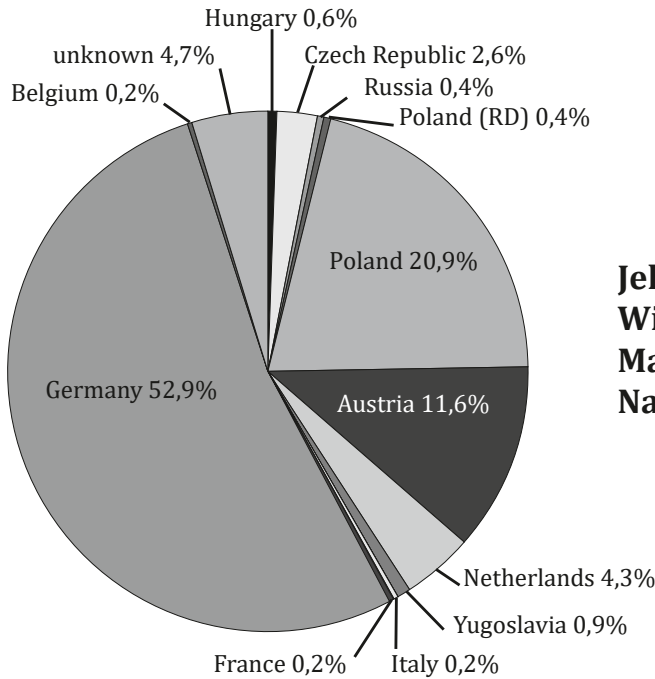
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<sup>16</sup> LS Erich Kunz.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Mauthausen Memorial website: Häftlingseuthanasie [Euthanasia of Prisoners].

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Haas, Die polnischen Zeugen Jehovas im KZ Ebensee [The Polish Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Ebensee Concentration Camp], 23.

most of whom came from Germany and Austria, in the main camp and the subcamps. Polish Jehovah's Witnesses were the second largest group within this community of prisoners. The majority of detained Jehovah's Witnesses were male (about 85%), whereas about 15% of them were women.

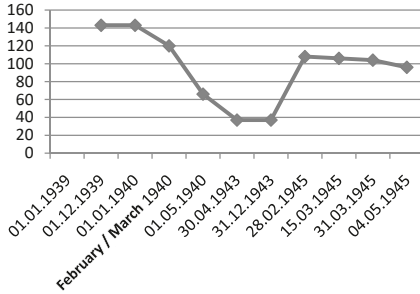


**Jehovah's  
Witnesses in  
Mauthausen –  
Nationalities**

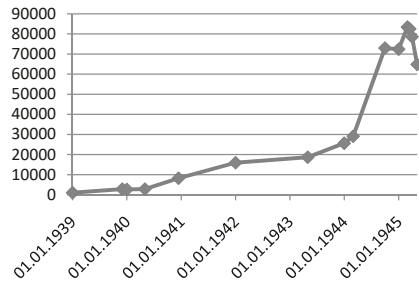
The following diagrams<sup>19</sup> show the development in the number of camp inmates in total and of the Bible Students exclusively. They clearly demonstrate that initially the Bible Students were a noteworthy group in the Mauthausen concentration camp but that their number decreased drastically after the mid-1940s. Only shortly before the end of the war do the numbers begin to rise again, though numerically the Bible Students no longer play a major role in the camp.

<sup>19</sup> Based on information given in Maršalek, Mauthausen, 137-150, 185-187 and Chêne, Mauthausen, 180-191.

## Bible Students



## Number of prisoners, total



According to research done to date, Jehovah’s Witnesses were deployed in the main camp as well as in 22 subcamps. They were allocated to the different camps in this manner – whereas it was also possible for prisoners to be detained in several camps: Amstetten (1), Amstetten Bahnbau II (2), Bretstein (6), Dippoldsau (2), Ebensee (13), Eisenerz (3), Großraming (1), Gusen (77), Schloss Hartheim (26), Klagenfurt (1), Schloss Lannach (9), Linz II (1), Linz III (5), Mauthausen (346), Melk (13), Schloss Mittersill (15), Peggau (5), Redl-Zipf (1), Schwechat (1), St. Lambrecht (23), St. Valentin (1), Steyr-Münichholz (53), Wien-Floridsdorf (1).

In total, approximately 110 (exclusively male) Jehovah’s Witnesses lost their lives in Mauthausen. The death rate peaked in the winter of 1939/1940 at 53.

## 2.2 Living Conditions

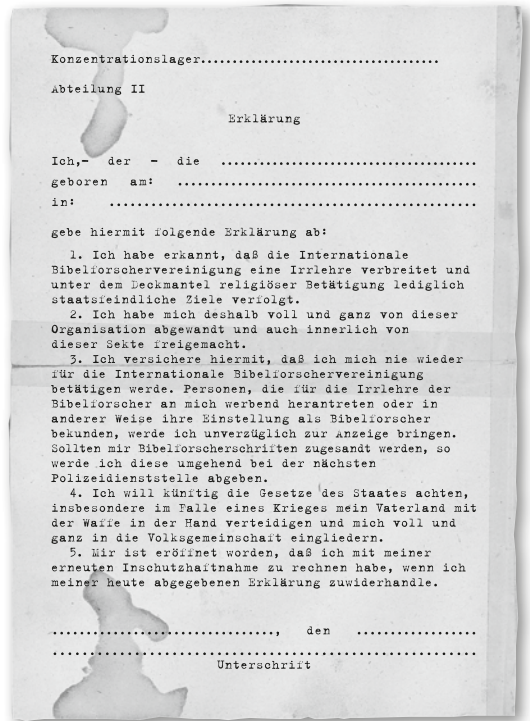
Mauthausen was the only level III camp in the German Reich. In a decree by Reinhard Heydrich of 1 January 1941 it says Mauthausen is to be chosen especially for “*prisoners in protective custody who are heavily charged, incorrigible and who at the same time have a criminal record and are antisocial, i.e., very difficult to discipline.*”<sup>20</sup> Transferring Jehovah’s Witnesses to Mauthausen aimed at destroying them and breaking the individual’s will by means of work. This is also reflected by a report given by a Jehovah’s Witness who describes how the SS perceived the Witnesses:

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Maršalek, Mauthausen, 35.

*"They paid special attention to us. We were despised more than the Jews. They did not understand that we as Germans used the name of the God of the Jews."<sup>21</sup>*

Right from the start, the SS used psychological tricks or the most brutal harassments to try to coerce the German and Austrian Jehovah's Witnesses also in Mauthausen to sign the so-called 'declaration' – the equivalent to renouncing their faith – and so make them fit for serving in the Wehrmacht. In the initial three years, they were summoned for questioning every three months.

In the first few months, there was an especially high death rate among Jehovah's Witnesses due to the murderous circumstances: Of the 144 Jehovah's Witnesses from Dachau, 53 Jehovah's Witnesses had died by April 1940, another 25 were transported back to Dachau on 18 February 1940.<sup>22</sup> The Nazis had succeeded in "getting rid of" 50% of the Bible Students.



**Declaration (replica)**

### 2.2.1 Accommodation and Clothing

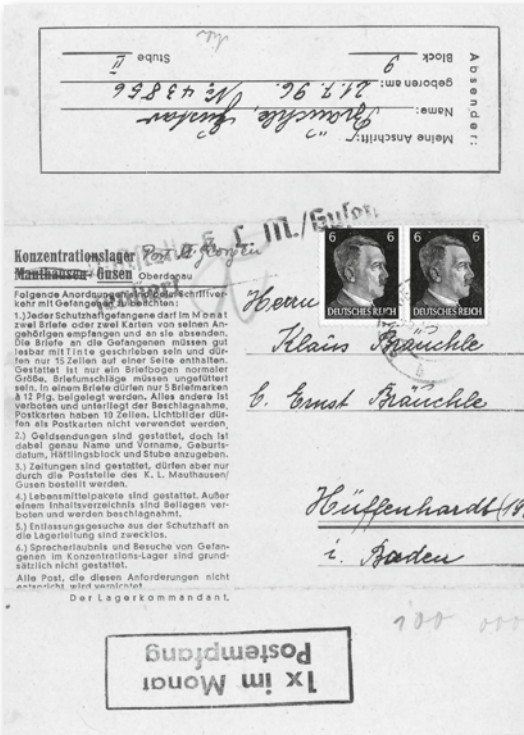
When arriving at Mauthausen, all Jehovah's Witnesses were initially assigned to Block 15 so as to separate them from other inmates, just as had been the case in Dachau too. According to Maršalek, only in the later years they were accommodated in different barracks (2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9) depending on their work units.<sup>23</sup> In the living quarters initially there were neither tables nor chairs and also no oven for heating. The winter of 1939/40 was especially grim on account of the

21 LS Josef Hechenblaickner.  
 22 Cf. Maršalek, Mauthausen, 185.  
 23 Cf. Maršalek, Mauthausen, 187.

low temperatures of up to -40 °C (-40 °F). In that winter the walls of the barracks were covered with a layer of ice as thick as a finger. Gustav Bräuchle describes the prison conditions in this manner:

*"We slept on the floor of the barracks, on top of a little bit of straw. Two prisoners shared a blanket. In the morning we were awakened with the call: 'Raise your head, whoever is still alive!'"*<sup>24</sup>

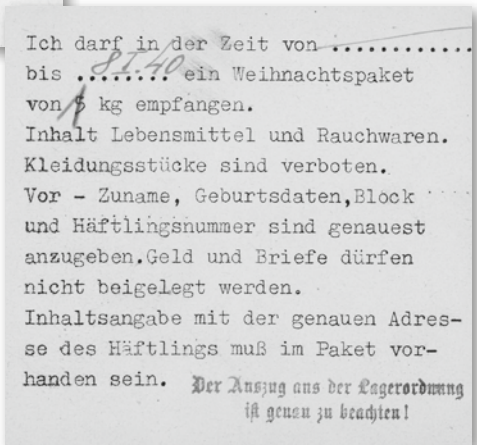
Members of the penal company, to which Jehovah's Witnesses also belonged in the first few months, were not given any winter clothing. As can be learned from different letters, it was not until the late winter that they were allowed to ask for a sweater. Since a ban on mail was imposed in Mauthausen during the first few months of imprisonment, inmates were not permitted to have any contact with their relatives either.<sup>25</sup>



**Gustav Bräuchle**

<sup>24</sup> LS Bräuchle.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Garbe, Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium, 413.



## 2.2.2 Food

Alois Moser, who was detained in 5 different concentration camps and their subcamps, describes that Jehovah's Witnesses in Dachau did not receive any supplementary rations, and other inmates were forbidden to give the Bible Students any food. In his memoirs, Moser describes Mauthausen as the worst thing he had ever experienced. His report on the food situation in Dachau in 1939/1940 exemplifies the conditions prevailing in Mauthausen:<sup>26</sup>

*"Because as a Bible Student I was marked with the Purple Triangle, oftentimes I did not receive any food supplement as other inmates did. One day, while we were all suffering from a dearth of food, the contents of a trailer full of food of all kind was being unloaded by the Jews and distributed among the political prisoners – except for me and my brothers. We were told that we could receive a portion if we renounced our faith. It was very bitter to see all of this because the lockers belonging to the others were stuffed full of good things to eat. Whoever was to give the Bible Students anything had to anticipate getting 25 blows with a stick."<sup>27</sup>*

Surviving was facilitated by the solidarity and close bond amongst the Witnesses. Those Jehovah's Witnesses who were eventually deployed as skilled workers received more to eat and shared it with the others. In the smaller subcamps, in which female Jehovah's Witnesses were primarily interned, conditions concerning food were also better.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2.3 Work Assignment

In the first period, Jehovah's Witnesses coming from Dachau were deployed in the quarry and in the construction of the Gusen concentration camp,<sup>29</sup> where they were submitted to particular harassment by the SS. Dreaded command leader Spatzenegger, commander of the Wiener Graben quarry, derided Jehovah's Witnesses by calling them "the committee of heaven" and "Bible worms." Prisoners remember him welcoming them with the words: *"The Wienergraben is a large grave, not one of you Bible Students will come out of here alive."*<sup>30</sup>

Hubert Mattischeck, himself a detainee in the Dachau, Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps, describes work in the quarry and the mistreatment by the SS in this way:

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26 Concerning the food situation in Mauthausen cf. Maršalek, Mauthausen, 53-56.

27 LS Moser.

28 For Mittersill cf. Baumgartner, Vergessene Frauen, 137-138.

29 Cf. Maršalek, Mauthausen 101.

30 LS Desch.

*"While the other inmates were allowed to walk on the steps as well as they could, we, however, were forced to run the gauntlet and chased up the steep, raised scarp. Every 15 to 20 meters stood a SS-man, who had nothing else in mind but to goad us on by kicking and beating us with his truncheon. Alternating between ridicule and mockery, they called out, 'Come here, Jehovah[!]' – 'But where is your Jehovah, so that he might help you?' Every once in a while, 'Start running, will you! Do you still believe in Jehovah?' Even before we had come down to the quarry, we had often already fallen over [...]."*<sup>31</sup>

## 2.2.4 Improved Working Conditions



**Erich Kunz**

In the beginning of the summer of 1940, circumstances gradually “improved” for those Jehovah’s Witnesses who had survived. Due to their diligence, honesty and non-compromising behavior, special work had been assigned to them, such as working in various workshops. Erich Kunz, for instance, had to take over the commercial office of the newly organized quarrying site of the DEST company (Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke [German Earth and Stone Works]) in Gusen, where he won the trust and confidence of the civilian manager about whom Kunz reported:

*“He himself also appreciated the reliability and the diligence of Jehovah’s Witnesses who, no matter where they were deployed, stood their ground and thus stuck out from the other prisoners. Hence, it was not too difficult for me to employ the brothers [other Jehovah’s Witnesses, ed.]*

*according on their skills in different workshops or even in the office where, after a relatively short time, I myself became responsible for about 30 prisoners. This way, they were protected from the rigors of the weather and the arbitrary acts of the SS.”*<sup>32</sup>

Such deeds of solidarity among the prisoners, through which the lives of others were sometimes saved, combined with the fact that prisoners wearing the purple triangle appeared in “better” commands, were definitely a thorn in the side of other groups of prisoners. As Erich Kunz describes, this provoked discontent especially among some “habitual criminals” who claimed the privilege for

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<sup>31</sup> LS Mattischek.

<sup>32</sup> LS Kunz.

themselves to occupy all key positions and work many times hand in hand with the SS to enjoy mutual benefits for both parties.<sup>33</sup>

On the order of Himmler, training began in October 1942 for 20 Jehovah's Witnesses to learn the craft of stonemasonry. Martin Pötzing, who became the leader of the school for stonemasons, recalls:

*„From then on, we were in a barrack and no longer had to work outdoors subjected to every wind and weather. Twice we spent half a day at the school for stonemasonry learning the trade, and of the 50 prisoners I personally even got the privilege of being head of this school.“<sup>34</sup>*



On 21 July 1944, Heinrich Himmler wrote to Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the Reich Security Main Office, and formally permitted Jehovah's Witnesses to be assigned to "positions of trust" (e.g., subcamps which were difficult to guard, SS households, administration), something which had already become common practice quite a while earlier in Mauthausen and its subcamps:



**Martin Pötzing**

*"This way it is possible to put genuine Bible Students in the CC [concentration camps] in all positions of trust which face a financial or otherwise material burden and by doing so treat them especially well."<sup>35</sup>*

33 Cf. LS Kunz; concerning the relationship between the Witnesses and political or criminal inmates – which was not always completely free of conflict – and their role in the administration of prisoners, cf. Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*, 439 (footnote), as well as Chêne, *Mauthausen*, 130.

34 LS Pötzing.

35 "Letter to Kaltenbrunner dated 21 July 1944" quoted from Farkas, *Geschichte(n) ins Leben holen*, 32-33.

In contrast to Maršalek's claim that Jehovah's Witnesses did not hold any prisoner's function,<sup>36</sup> it has been determined that at least three Jehovah's Witnesses were foremen or overseers (locksmith overseer in the Wiener Graben quarry or in Gusen, respectively, and overseer of the bricklayers).<sup>37</sup> Besides being the director of the Gusen orchestra<sup>38</sup> Heinrich Lutterbach from Munich also held the position of second camp secretary in Gusen until the liberation. The psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim, who came in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses while he was imprisoned in the Dachau concentration camp as a Jew, describes them as follows:

*"Though they were the only group of prisoners who never insulted or mistreated other inmates (on the contrary, in general they were quite polite towards other inmates), the SS men still preferred them as overseers because they were diligent, skillful and discreet. In contrast to the permanent murderous feud between other groups of prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses never took advantage of the fact that they had a lot to do with the SS men in order to attain a privileged position."*<sup>39</sup>

## 2.3 Forms of Resistance and Survival Strategies

Despite the unhuman living and working conditions, Jehovah's Witnesses kept their identity which was strongly shaped by their religion. Moreover, they developed strategies of solidarity and of survival. Even in the camp, they refused to meet the SS' demands, if these were in opposition to their religious beliefs, and tried to win new members of their faith.

### 2.3.1 Refusal to Sign a Declaration Renouncing Their Faith

Hans Maršalek writes about Jehovah's Witnesses:

*"Because the German and Austrian Jehovah's Witnesses – strictly adhering to the Bible's prohibition to kill – refused to serve in the military and to take the oath of allegiance to Hitler, they were persecuted and sent to concentration camps. They were the only prisoners who were for a certainty able to bring about the end of their detention by their own actions. For the Bible Students had the possibility to sign a declaration [...]."*<sup>40</sup>

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36 Cf. Maršalek, Mauthausen 186.

37 Gustav Bräuchle was a foreman in the locksmith's shop in the Wiener Graben and, for a while, Martin Mellinger was foreman in the locksmith's shop in Gusen.

38 Cf. Maršalek, Mauthausen 380.

39 Bettelheim, *Aufstand gegen die Masse* [Revolt Against the Masses], 135.

40 Maršalek, Mauthausen 185.

Jehovah's Witnesses were offered the possibility to sign a standardized "declaration" in which they renounced their faith and pledged allegiance to the NS state. Doing this would have freed them from the concentration camp. Giving their signature, however, would have entailed violating their religious values and their conscience. As Detlef Garbe expounds, the signature would have meant that Jehovah's Witnesses who were liable for military service would not have automatically received their immediate release but – at least until 1942 – would immediately have been drafted into the Wehrmacht. In view of the strong cohesion within the group, this also evoked the fear of losing the community of brothers and sisters in the faith.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, only few Jehovah Witnesses made use of this possibility. Detlef Garbe and Hans Maršalek mention one individual who was presumably freed from Mauthausen under these conditions in 1939. In 1940 three Witnesses signed the declaration and two in 1942.<sup>42</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses viewed the living circumstances in the camp as a challenge to keep their faith and their integrity. Again and again, they needed to decide where they had to resist the demands of the SS and where they could reasonably collaborate with them. This was especially true with regard to work assigned to them which alleviated their survival.

The Nazis thought up all conceivable kinds of harassment so as to move the Witnesses to sign the document anyhow. Hubert Mattischek reports:

*"Again and again, block leaders came to us to have their own kind of fun, and two of them stood out especially by always looking for new methods to torture us. Unnoticed and as fast as lightning, they jumped through the windows into the barrack room and asked mockingly: 'Don't you see? Jehovah has come to you! I am Jehovah! Worship me! – Am I not Jehovah?' And immediately they began distributing bloody punches and blows to our heads. For no reason at all, 25 beatings with a stick were administered. And this continued until their devilish sensation was satisfied. Such scenes were repeated daily with varying demands: 'Our regime needs people like you are! Renounce Jehovah and work together with us! Our determined 'No, I will not sign [the document],' was again followed by 25 beatings with a stick."<sup>43</sup>*

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41 Cf. Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*, 313, 427.

42 Cf. Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium*, 426, also Maršalek, Mauthausen, 185, and Langbein, *Schafe zur Schlachtbank* [Sheep to the Slaughtering Block], 189.

43 LS Mattischek amongst others.

### 2.3.2 Refusal to Sign the Draft Card

Hans Maršalek reports that until the end of 1941, Jehovah's Witnesses were routinely abused when representatives of the draft board appeared.<sup>44</sup> In his book "1000 Tage im KZ" [1,000 Days in the Concentration Camp] Erwin Gostner, a former political prisoner, remembers the terrible consequences of refusing to sign the draft card:

*"Only for Jehovah's Witnesses there are horrible repercussions. 35 of them refused to sign the draft card. Their faith forbids them to kill other people; [...] By doing so, they have pronounced their own death sentence. Each one of them gets a heavy granite stone heaved on their shoulders and they have to run around the detention bunker all morning long. At lunchtime they are not given any food but have to stand there with a shovel handle stuck behind their neck and outstretched arms looking directly into the sun, for hours! In the afternoon they again do their circles around the bunker carrying the heavy stones. Whoever breaks down is beaten by the SS guard and thrown into the detention cell, left to die a miserable death. This ordeal is continued for eight days until the last of the 35 Bible Students has been murdered. It is a nineteen-year-old fellow. He was able to*

*endure the longest. His face, pressed hard against the stone, is caked with blood. He staggers around the building, becoming slower and slower, then finally he stands still, his whole body shaking, and sinks to the floor. 'Traitor!' With this insult, the guard knocks him completely to the ground and drags him to the cell, the last of the thirty-five."<sup>45</sup>*



Hubert Mattischek

During one of these inspections by the draft board in October 1942, there was a tragic turn of events for 22 Jehovah's Witnesses who no longer worked in the quarry but already had better positions. Hubert Mattischek recalls:

44 Maršalek, 185.

45 Gostner, 1000 Tage im KZ [1000 Days in the Concentration Camp], 95-96.

*"Now camp commander Ziereis entered the scene and declared: 'I give you my officer's word of honor that you will be released immediately if you sign.' A repeated unanimous, 'No, we will never sign,' made him as furious as a fire-breathing dragon. 'So, you refuse to recognize the highest authority, the state and our Führer, Adolf Hitler, and you refuse to sign the document.' At this, they were bombarded with terrible swear words which culminated in his threat: 'In our eyes, you are more base and pitiful than the most common criminal. I will hang you up upside down, and you'll get nothing to eat until you die a wretched death; you will never get out of this camp alive!'"<sup>46</sup>*

At first, these 22 Witnesses were sent back to the quarry, where they were to be killed. However, since one did not want to do without the men's labor power, Himmler himself was contacted and informed about the Bible Students' "stubbornness" and – according to the account of Bible Students who were detained there at the time – after a week his order was received to train 20 of them as stonemasons.<sup>47</sup>

### **2.3.3 Refusal to Perform Work in the Armament Industry**

Starting about in the autumn of 1943, the production in the quarries was more and more reduced, and prisoners of the Mauthausen concentration camp were more and more assigned to the increasingly important armament industry. After the Messerschmitt aircraft manufacturing corporation in Regensburg was bombed, it was relocated to St. Georgen/Gusen and Jehovah's Witnesses were also supposed to be moved from the quarries to work in the armament industry. Erich Kunz was offered to take over the office operation of the Messerschmitt factory instead of the one of the DEST, which, however, he firmly rejected despite threats. He was finally allowed to stay in the quarry:

*"The unwavering refusal of the brothers to work in the armament industry initially stirred up a wave of indignation on the opposite side, and one brother paid with his life for his staunch attitude."<sup>48</sup>*

Josef Hechenblaickner, a Jehovah's Witness from Tyrol, managed to avoid work in the armament industry in a different manner. In his recollections recorded in 2001, he wrote:

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<sup>46</sup> LS Mattischek and others.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. LS Pötzingner.

<sup>48</sup> LS Kunz.

*"In 1943, I was supposed to go to the Hermann Göring Werke to work there in the armament industry. But I did not want to do that. One day an imprisoned clergyman working in the sickbays told me that they were looking for someone who was willing to undergo goiter surgery. I volunteered and so was able to avoid the assignment to work in the armament industry. During the operation I was fully conscious. After the war I was operated on two more times (1965, 1977). A cannula was inserted because I had suffered from paralysis of the vocal cords."<sup>49</sup>*

### **2.3.4 Religious Activities in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp**

Any kind of religious activity was strictly forbidden in the concentration camp – especially for Jehovah’s Witnesses. Nevertheless, also the Bible Students detained in Mauthausen and its subcamps continued their habit of strengthening each other’s faith by reading the Bible and leading religious conversations. Of course, such meetings had to be conducted as discreetly as possible as Erich Kunz describes:

*"During all the past years, it had been a matter of course to gather whenever possible in the little free time we had after work in order to discuss various Biblical topics and exchange our ideas. Sometimes, however, this had to take place very inconspicuously during harmless walks among other prisoners, possibly only in twos or threes. [...] And now we even happened to be able to gather according to a carefully prepared plan in groups of six to eight brothers at separate locations within the camp to conduct our study projects."<sup>50</sup>*

Such secret meetings were also held in the sculpture workshop of the Mauthausen concentration camp until the liberation. Walter Fröhlich was a German Witness who worked along with others as a sculptor and took the lead.<sup>51</sup> . The Witnesses in Gusen also celebrated the annual “Memorial”<sup>52</sup> to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ:

*"Managing to obtain the emblems [bread and wine], they assembled while everyone else was asleep. The washrooms and toilets at Gusen were located*

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49 LS Hechenblaickner.

50 LS Kunz.

51 Cf. LS Otrebski.

52 Another name for the celebration of the Lord’s Evening Meal, which Jehovah’s Witnesses celebrate once a year on 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan after sundown to commemorate the death of Jesus. The date is calculated according to the old Jewish lunar calendar.

*between the barracks, at a distance of approximately 6 meters [20 feet]. In such a washroom, with the light from a candle, they celebrated the Memorial.”<sup>53</sup>*

Jehovah’s Witnesses were generally forbidden to have a Bible in the camp because reading it strengthened their conviction. Nevertheless, they did their utmost to acquire a Bible and they also succeeded in doing so in various ways. Once, the detained Witnesses received a Bible through a prisoner who worked in the crematorium.<sup>54</sup> The Austrian Hubert Mattischek, in turn, reported about a newcomer who smuggled a Bible into the camp:

*“It was divided into small parts in order to make it disappear faster. Each part was handed on separately and read in one’s free time in the semi-darkness underneath the bed. Once, we were betrayed. Everyone had to line up. ‘Where is the Bible? Hand it over to us or something will happen to all of you!’ The situation was dangerous, but one brother saved us. ‘Yes, we handed around something to read. Here it is.’ He pulled out a page of a newspaper. He pointed to the headline: ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses imprisoned in Great Britain due to conscientious objection.’ He also added: ‘If all Christians acted like this, this unnecessary war that they are forced to wage would certainly not have broken out.’ Thereupon the commander called out: ‘Dismissed!’”<sup>55</sup>*

Religious literature such as the forbidden *Watchtower* was also smuggled to Mauthausen – most likely through work assignments in other camps or in packages sent by relatives<sup>56</sup> – and then even copied in the camp. Heinrich Lutterbach remembers:

*“As a camp clerk I had the chance to move around relatively freely and in part also unattended. This was possible because sometimes I worked night shifts compiling the transport lists. To do so, I repeatedly went to the crematorium and while the bodies of executed prisoners were burned, I made copies of the issues of the WT [Watchtower] on the typewriter. This took place with the consent of the other prisoners working there.”<sup>57</sup>*

In order to engage in conversations with inmates from different countries as well, the German Jehovah’s Witnesses used so-called testimony cards in different languages for their evangelizing activity. As a result, 5 to 8 prisoners (mainly

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53 Yearbook 1989, 133. Cf. also LS Desch.

54 Cf. LS Linsbauer.

55 LS Mattischek.

56 Cf. Yearbook 1989, 132-133.

57 LS Lutterbach.

of Polish and Russian origin) also expressed the desire to become Jehovah's Witnesses and be baptized.<sup>58</sup> Erich Kunz was an eyewitness and reported every detail of how the baptism took place in the heating room of the locksmith's workshop in Gusen:

*"In the carpenter's workshop on the grounds of the quarry, where a brother [in the faith] was the foreman, several brothers cut appropriate boards to construct a reasonably watertight, rectangular tub-like container. Every few days, one board after the other was transported inconspicuously to the locksmith's workshop in the quarry, for which also a brother carried the responsibility as the foreman, and there they disappeared in the heating cellar. [...] In the course of the morning the delivered boards were turned into a tub, and during the lunch-break the brothers entrusted with the matter and those wanting to be baptized appeared in the heating cellar one after the other, discreetly and carefully. While other brothers were instructed to keep watch outside, attentively monitoring every direction so as to prevent any possible surprises, the baptism was performed in the heating cellar, unnoticed by all non-participants."<sup>59</sup>*



**Franz Desch (left) and Franz Walek after the war**

A number of Jehovah's Witnesses were assigned to the carpenter's workshop and the neighboring horse stable of the Gusen concentration camp, located in the industrial complex outside of the camp. Franz Desch from Tyrol [Austria] was engaged in a conversation with SS Oberscharführer Franz Walek, who was responsible for the horses and the breeding of the rabbits: "I have been watching you for a few years and have noticed that you have a completely different sense of humor than the other prisoners have."<sup>60</sup> Desch explained that this was because of their Bible-based hope. This contact led to a number of religious conversations, all of which took place secretly in the building where the rabbits were bred. Josef Hechenblaickner, who was transferred from Mauthausen to Gusen in 1943, also remembers Walek:

*"Together with two other Jehovah's Witnesses, I was responsible for the horses in Gusen. Our guard was SS leader Franz Walek, who even allowed us to read in the Bible. We were not exposed to any harassment there either. In the concentration*

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. LS Lutterbach. – Baptisms of Jehovah's Witnesses involve total immersion in water.

<sup>59</sup> LS Kunz.

<sup>60</sup> LS Desch.

*camp, he began speaking to Franz Desch about the Bible. Whenever I drove with him to the farmers to get food for the horses, I was also able to speak to him about the Bible. When he received something from home, he shared it with us, even though this meant putting himself at a great risk.”<sup>61</sup>*

A few years later, Franz Desch met former SS-Oberscharführer Walek again at a convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses. He had become a Witness himself.<sup>62</sup>

These religious activities, especially the smuggling of letters and literature “out of” and “into” the camp, did not remain unnoticed, however. In a circular of 10 September 1943, Oswald Pohl reprimanded the commanders of various concentration camps, including Mauthausen, with regard to their supervisory duties and demanded Jehovah’s Witnesses be divided up among the different barracks:

*“In these letters, events in the camp and the suffering of the Bible Students are described. They are simply packed with lies and hatred against the Reich. [...] No matter what might really be true about these statements, it is certainly the case that the supervision of the Bible Students has been neglected. This indifference toward the supervision and surveillance definitely arose due to the fact that the Bible Students’ work performance is outstandingly good, wherever they are assigned to. [...] It is appropriate to put two to three Bible Students in each block among the other prisoners.”<sup>63</sup>*

According to Maršalek, this order was irrelevant for the Mauthausen main camp since the German Jehovah’s Witnesses were housed in different barracks anyhow depending on their work command.<sup>64</sup> In Gusen, where they had been accommodated in barracks 15, all Jehovah’s Witnesses were divided between different blocks in 1943 so as to prevent them from strengthening one another in their conviction. This, however, turned out to be a boomerang, because this way they were able to engage in conversations with others and subsequently a number of Germans, Poles and Russians also become interested in their beliefs. And since this was of course not in the interest of the SS, they were again housed together.<sup>65</sup>

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61 LS Hechenblaickner.

62 In the post-war trials, Walek was acquitted because of positive testimonies of former prisoners. Cf. LS Steingraber.

63 “Secret circular to the commanders of the concentration camps concerning the Bible Students’ subversive propaganda in the concentration camps and workplaces, 10. Sept. 1943,” quoted from Klein, Jehovas Zeugen im KZ Dachau, 48.

64 Cf. Maršalek, Mauthausen, 186-187.

65 Cf. LS Lutterbach.

### 2.3.5 Solidarity in the Camp

Jehovah's Witnesses became known for their solidarity towards their fellow believers, but also towards other prisoners. Even though political prisoners often did not understand their beliefs or their refusal to take part in actions of political resistance in the camp, they appreciated their humane behavior and testified favorably on their behalf.

Jehovah's Witnesses helped each other during work at the quarries, shared their meager food rations and supported one another whenever someone was sick. When the Austrian Alois Moser collapsed in the quarry in the winter of 1939/40, he only survived due to the assistance of his comrades:

*"A brother who noticed this tucked me in a hole in the rock and watched over me discreetly until the end of the working day. Being protected from the icy wind enabled me to regain my strength. The brothers always risked their lives for other brothers!"<sup>66</sup>*

Smuggling fellow believers into "better" labor detachments was considered a special kind of help. Being in charge of the Gusen quarry office, the aforementioned Erich Kunz, for instance, was able to aid about 30 Jehovah's Witnesses to better work assignments and thus alleviate their difficult living circumstances. When Polish Jehovah's Witnesses arrived at Gusen from Auschwitz, they were received by those who had already been in the camp for a longer time. Food was thrown over the fence to them, which they then divided up amongst each other. Jan Otrebski, who was only 20 years old at the time, recalls:

*"There was enough food for all of us, and what was left over was distributed among fellow prisoners. The prisoners witnessed something out of the ordinary: brotherly love in the extermination camp. Never before had they experienced such care. 'The Purple ones will help.' This had become a well-known phrase among the prisoners."<sup>67</sup>*

On 15 June 1943, a total of 400 prisoners were transferred to the Eisenerz subcamp and then on to Peggau on 24 February 1945. Jan Otrebski was among them and was thus torn out of the unit of fellow believers. Nevertheless, his religious attitude also compelled him to continue showing tolerance and solidarity to

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66 Hillinger, Kraft, die über das Normale hinausgeht [The Power Beyond What Is Normal], 34.

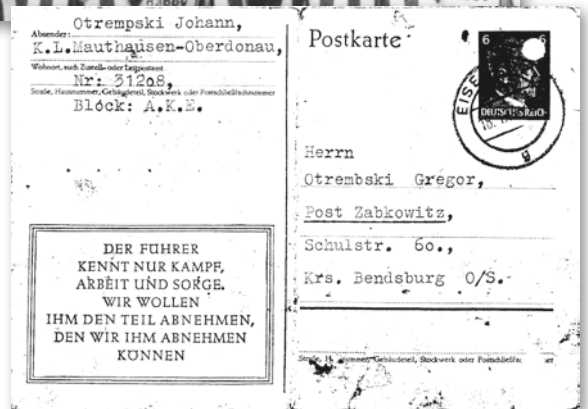
67 LS Otrebski.

other prisoners no matter what their nationality or religion were: “The Bible teaches us to love all people, regardless of their race, religion or views.”<sup>68</sup>



Jan Otrebski

Eugen Schwab, a German Jehovah’s Witness, was transferred from Dachau to Mauthausen on 29 September 1939. He was an electrician and was first deployed in the “Wiener Graben” quarry as an apprentice stonemason. Most likely he was one of the first prisoners to be transferred to Ebensee in 1943. Many Polish Jehovah’s Witnesses owe their life to him too because he picked out all Jehovah’s Witnesses among the new arrivals and brought all of them to one block. He also helped them by dividing up his additional food rations among them. He organized religious meeting too, where the Witnesses received necessary spiritual encouragement. Pawel Szalbot, a Polish Witness, remembers Eugen Schwab:



68 LS Otrebski.

*“On the second day after our arrival this brother in the faith came to the camp gate in order to search through the prisoner card indices. [...] He counted eight persons who were Jehovah’s Witnesses. [...] He came to each block and asked the clerk. This way he was able to seek out all of us. [...] We Jehovah’s Witnesses were then gathered in one block so that our plank beds stood very close to one another. [...] He was an electrician in the camp and worked in many different blocks. He did not do any other work. Wherever he worked, he received provisions, but he never ate alone, instead he always came to us after work and first held a Bible-based talk and afterwards shared what he had received with us all.”<sup>69</sup>*

## 2.4 Liberation

On 5 May 1945, the day of liberation, the unity Jehovah’s Witnesses had among themselves protected them from being harmed in the general chaos and by the well-known acts of revenge of the prisoners:

*“We brothers ran back to the camp [Gusen] because we wanted to remain together and be united, not like the others who crowded to the exit. [...] That evening, far more than a thousand prisoners lost their lives because they murdered one another. But none of us brothers were harmed in any way.”<sup>70</sup>*

When the turmoil broke out, Heinrich Lutterbach was in the registry office in Gusen together with Karl Krause, a fellow believer, and the first camp clerk, Adolf Jahnke from Berlin. Lutterbach remembers how Jahnke, for fear of acts of revenge from fellow prisoners, prepared to flee: *“He opened the door an inch to peer out, but already the others had grabbed him. A short outcry was heard, and he was trampled on by the raging hordes of people.”<sup>71</sup>* Lutterbach and Krause had been warned by a prominent Polish prisoner and were able to reach their block unscathed.<sup>72</sup>

Jan Otrebski and two other Jehovah’s Witnesses returned to Mauthausen from the meanwhile dissolved subcamp Peggau with the evacuation transport. He reports:

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<sup>69</sup> Haas, Die polnischen Zeugen Jehovas im KZ Ebensee, 28.

<sup>70</sup> LS Pötzingner.

<sup>71</sup> LS Lutterbach.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. LS Lutterbach.

*“On 4 April 1945, early in the morning, brothers approached us asking for me and Brother Truckenbrodt. As we found out, on the very next day the brothers recognized our clothes with the purple triangle and immediately started searching for us. [...] The brothers organized secret meetings in the building where the sculptor’s workshop was located. It was behind the wall. A continually locked door led there from the camp. Only those working there had a key. At an agreed time and using a prearranged signal, the brothers opened the door for us. Normal meetings took place there, similar to those in the congregation with questions and answers. Johannes Rauthe conducted these meetings. [...] The brothers contacted the brothers from Gusen. I also went along on such visits. We cut across country and witnessed to the inhabitants who didn’t know what atrocities had taken place in their vicinity in the Mauthausen and Gusen camps. They offered us apple juice and were very hospitable. [...] We took pictures in the camps, both in Mauthausen and in Gusen. The pictures show the smiling faces of the brothers who had preserved a good conscience, clean clothes and unspotted speech, just as is expected from true Christians.”<sup>73</sup>*



**Jehovah's Witnesses in the Gusen concentration camp after the liberation**

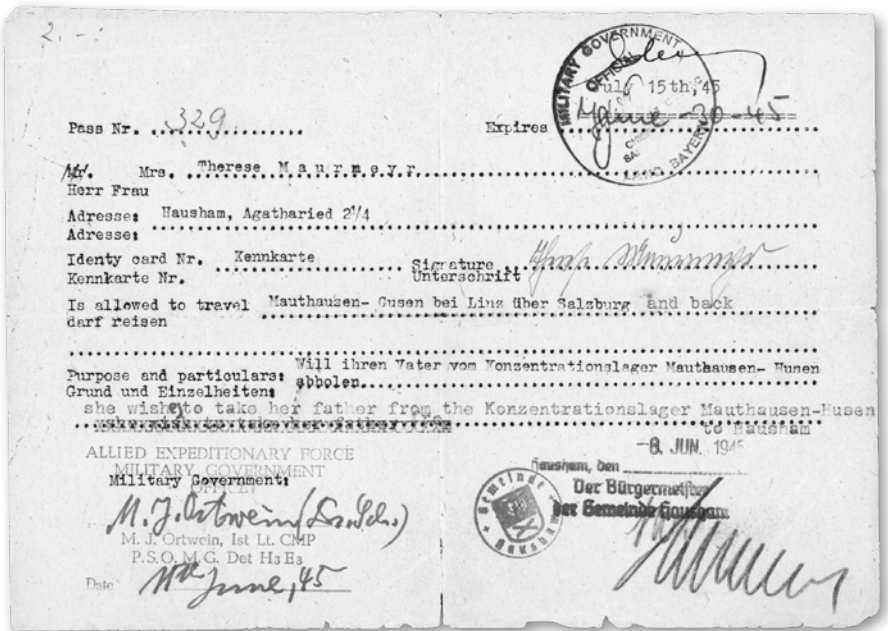
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73 LS Otrebski.

In his book "Gusen", the Polish prisoner Jan Nogaj writes that only 54 Bible Students remained in Gusen on 5 May 1945:

*"Without being asked to do so, they spent the next days cleaning up the camp. They worked for 14 hours, even though they had been encouraged to take it easy. Among them there were five Poles and a Czech man, all the others were Germans. These people did not pay any attention to national distinctions."*<sup>74</sup>

The example of Therese Maurmeyr depicts the circumstances after liberation very well. With the permit of the American military authorities, she set off to Mauthausen in July 1945 to personally pick up her father, Georg Steingraber, who had been imprisoned for more than 8 years. Austrian Jehovah's Witnesses had informed her that her father had still been alive at the time of their liberation. She inquired about her father at the registry office and the card indices were perused – but he could not be found right away. Coincidentally, a man entered who knew where her father was. Two sentinels were sent to the former pigsty, where the Jehovah's Witnesses were forced to live in the camp after their



Permit of the American military authorities

74 Quoted from LS Otrebski.

liberation. When they returned along with a 1.73 m [5.7 foot] tall, emaciated man weighing 35 kilos [70.5 lb.], she did not recognize her father. But he called out: “Resi, what on earth are you doing here!”<sup>75</sup>

Some Jehovah’s Witnesses remained in Mauthausen to be nursed back to health before leaving a few weeks or months later, some stayed until the beginning of September. A group of German Jehovah’s Witnesses left the camp and headed toward Vienna, where they arrived at the end of July and then helped to organize and conduct meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the different districts of Vienna. In October 1945, they returned to Germany on a repatriation train after up to 9 years of detention.<sup>76</sup>

On 5 May 1945, about 50 mainly German Jehovah’s Witnesses were freed from the Steyr-Münichholz subcamp. They had belonged to the so-called “First SS Construction Brigade.”<sup>77</sup> Thanks to the intervention of a Russian prisoner, they managed to leave the camp unscathed by acts of revenge on all Germans performed by the Russian prisoners. Helmut Knöllner reports:

*“Finally, our train came to a stop in Steyr/Austria. The SS was ordered to hand us over to a small camp. Prior to this, though, all those who were sick were rounded up and taken to a large camp to be gassed. Only with difficulty and trickery were we able to save our diseased brothers from this end! 5 days later, the SS all of a sudden ran for their lives into the forests and mountains: The white flag was raised at the entrance to the camp! It was 5 May 1945. The next evening, we 50 brothers packed our things, loaded them on a large trailer, put our sick brothers on top and pulled the car with joint forces toward our home! In the meantime, the prisoners had obtained weapons and alcohol, and the Russian detainees took their revenge on the German prisoners who had sided with the SS as accomplices and bullied their fellow prisoners earlier on. Just as we wanted to drive out of the camp, the Russians closed the gate in front of us and refused to let us out! We all prayed to Jehovah. Two Russians, who had accepted the truth, were unable to accomplish much. But then another Russian, who knew us, appeared and said: ‘Bible Students, they’re all good fellows, they weren’t mean. Let them go!’ The gate was opened, and we were allowed to leave. We breathed a sigh of relief. Not a single other German managed*

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Klein, *Jehovas Zeugen im KZ Dachau*, 173-174.

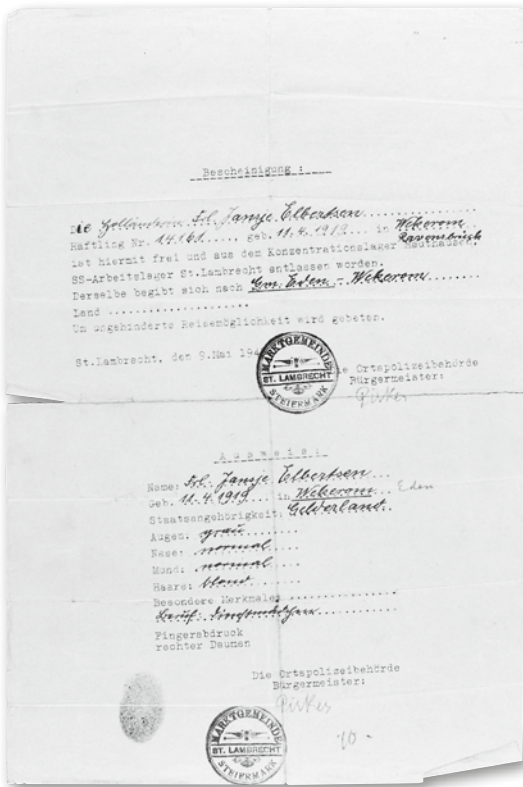
<sup>76</sup> Cf. LS Bräuchle.

<sup>77</sup> Helmut Knöllner, a Jehovah’s Witness from Munich, was an office clerk in the camp and handed over the master index of the First SS Construction Brigade to the Americans in Passau. He kept the index cards of 49 Jehovah’s Witnesses (40 Germans, 4 Dutchmen, 3 Poles and 2 Russians). They are now preserved in the Historical Archives of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany.

to escape alive! So, now our trek made its way toward Germany. After a few days, we found a tractor and also some fuel and hooked our trailer to it. Now we no longer had to pull but could sit on top and ride!"<sup>78</sup>

The 15 female Jehovah's Witnesses liberated from the subcamps Schloss Mittersill and Schloss Lannach were initially brought to Mauthausen, where they received discharge papers.<sup>79</sup> Under the most difficult circumstances they returned back home from there or even went back to the place of their imprisonment. Ottilie Weber, for example, spent at least two more years at Schloss Mittersill working as a cleaning woman.<sup>80</sup>

The 23 female Jehovah's Witnesses detained in the subcamp in the abbey of St. Lambrecht were liberated by the British on 11 May 1945 and given an identity card with their fingerprint on it. The women received clothes from the population, packed their prisoners' garb, their dishes and cutlery stemming from the Ravensbrück concentration camp in their knapsacks and left St. Lambrecht two weeks later. Before their departure, they gathered around a tree in front of the abbey and sang the song "All honor belongs to Jehovah," giving thanks for their liberation and survival. Together with the Spanish prisoners, they left St. Lambrecht in a truck given to them by the British.<sup>81</sup>



Identity card from St. Lambrecht belonging to the Dutchwoman Jansje Elbertsen

78 LS Knöllner.

79 Cf. Karner/Gsell/Lesiak, Schloss Lannach, 167.

80 Cf. Gsell, Jehovas Zeugen unter dem NS-Regime [Jehovah's Witnesses Under the Nazi Regime], 93.

81 Cf. Farkas, Geschichte(n) ins Leben holen, 130-132.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

Many Jehovah's Witnesses who had also been detained in other camps described Mauthausen to be the worst of all camps. Not only the mercilessly harsh winter of 1939/40 with extreme temperatures as low as -40 °C (-40 °F) contributed to this assessment but also the generally disastrous living and nutritional conditions, as well as the hard work in the quarry and the construction of the Gusen concentration camp. In addition, there were the constantly recurring interrogations and disciplinary measures by the SS who felt provoked by the Witnesses' acts of refusal and missionary activity.

Despite the inhuman conditions, Jehovah's Witnesses treated others in a decent and respectful manner. Only their strong solidarity, shown especially amongst one another but also manifested toward other inmates, made survival possible. Over time, the German and Austrian Jehovah's Witnesses were appointed to preferred positions. They did not receive them by ingratiating themselves with the SS, though. Instead, they gained the respect of others through their diligence, reliability and unconditional adherence to their principles. They also assumed various prisoners' functions and were able to help Jehovah's Witnesses from other countries to be assigned to better work brigades too. Even under the most extreme conditions, Jehovah's Witnesses remained loyal to Bible principles and acted in harmony with their conscience. This helped them to draw the necessary strength for their non-violent resistance against the SS regime and to keep their integrity. It is apparent that nothing was able to undermine their religious conviction, for they kept evangelizing within the camps and resumed their activities and conducted religious meetings immediately after their liberation and the end of the war.

One might be able to imagine the triumph felt by the 6,000 surviving Jehovah's Witnesses from Germany and Austria when, from 28 to 30 September 1946, their first religious convention held in liberty took place on the Zeppelin-Wiese in Nuremberg – Hitler's parade ground with its huge buildings constructed by stones which had been carved also by Jehovah's Witnesses in Mauthausen – while at the same time the first death sentences were being proclaimed at the Nuremberg Trials. The psychologist Bruno Bettelheim reported the following about them:

*"The imprisonment mattered even less to them [to Jehovah's Witnesses, ed.] than to the political prisoners and they kept their integrity because of their strong religious convictions. [...] On the other hand, they were exemplary comrades, helpful, correct and reliable."<sup>82</sup>*



**Schloss Mittersill**



**St. Lambrecht's Abbey**



**Schloss Lannach**

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82 Bettelheim, *Aufstand gegen die Masse*, 135.

# 4. Prisoners' Biographies

## 4.1 Anton Spießberger

Gassed in Schloss Hartheim on 24 April 1942

Anton Spießberger was born on 3 January 1889 in Pinsdorf near Gmunden, Austria, and – like many others – had to cope with unemployment and hardship in the interwar period. Even though he was a trained shoemaker, he was always in search of a way to make a living for his wife Maria and himself. Unemployed and receiving no financial support from the state, he traveled around the country, completely dependent on the generosity of kind people. Being a Protestant, he belonged to a minority in Catholic Upper Austria. Although he was disappointed by politics, his faith in God was very important to him and he enjoyed speaking to others about it. While staying in the vicinity of Wels, he started having conversations with a Bible Student living in the neighborhood. He was so enthralled by the Bible Students' teachings that he soon began sharing his knowledge with others.

When he found work at a shoemaker's in Bad Ischl a while later, he was already convinced of his newly found religion and held long conversations about the Bible with his boss. In order to reach even more people, he traveled very far – even all the way to Graz – and all of this despite suffering from a painful foot condition, which caused him a lot of pain when walking.



**Anton Spießberger**

In the late 1920s, he moved to Viechtwang (Grünau district) where he found a job in the area as a shoemaker's assistant. Up to this day, former neighbors still remember his visits:

*"Mister Spießberger was a tall, serious man with dark hair, customarily dressed in black, wearing a shirt with a stand-up collar. He usually visited us alone and came on*

*foot, even though his feet caused him great discomfort. Every few weeks, he visited our neighbors and us, brought literature and read to us from the Bible."*

Based in Grünau, he specially supported a small group of Bible Students in Molln in the Upper Austrian Steyr Valley. He regularly undertook the 70-km-long (43-mile) journey to encourage his fellow believers and share with them in the missionary work. With time, the activities of this small group evoked the displeasure of the local priest, and even the state authorities reacted with arbitrariness and imposed restrictions.

After the annexation to the National Socialist German Reich in 1938, the new government launched a systematic and relentless persecution. This was already apparent in the referendum on the annexation to the Nazi regime. Everyone in his hometown knew very well that only three people voted against it and that one of them was this "good-for-nothing" Spießberger.

Shortly after the Nazis' assumption of power, the secret service infiltrated the group with a spy who managed to win Spießberger's trust. After having gained enough information about the individual members of the group, they were confronted with a ruthless wave of arrests. In the spring of 1939, two Gestapo officials came to the Almtal to arrest him. They completely ransacked his little apartment, even tearing out the floor in search of Bible literature. Even though his boss stood up on his behalf trying to keep him in his business, Anton was carted away.

After a short time in the police prison of Linz, Anton was transferred to the Dachau concentration camp on 16 June 1939 (inmate number 1383). Then, in September 1939, Anton Spießberger and many other prisoners were deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Upper Austria. 144 other Jehovah's Witnesses were also among them. The 50-year-old shoemaker, suffering from a foot ailment, was not able to cope with the cold winter temperatures and the strenuous work in the quarry and so he was sent back to Dachau on 18 February 1940. He managed to survive there for two years but was then again moved on 26 February 1942. On his last journey, an invalid transport took him to the so-called "recovery camp" Hartheim near Eferding in Upper Austria. Most likely he was gassed there immediately upon arrival. Cynically, the official announcement of his death read: *"According to a communication from the Dachau concentration camp, Spießberger died on 24 April 1942 from cardiovascular failure during a bout of pneumonia."*

## 4.2 August Kraft

Died in the Mauthausen concentration camp on 1 February 1940.

August Kraft (or Krafzig) was born in Germany on 13 October 1886. It is unknown when exactly he moved to Vienna and why. What is certain, however, is that he was in Vienna already in the late 1920s and had close association with the group of Bible Students. Kraft, who was not married, lived at Neubaugasse 45 in the 7th district of Vienna. He was active already in a very early phase of the Bible Students' movement in Austria and served as a secretary in the Vienna office. He was an incorporator of the Austrian branch of the "Watchtower Bible and Tract Society" and committed to the fight against the repression of Jehovah's Witnesses by the corporate state authorities in the 1930s. Immediately prior to the Anschluss, the buildings of the Watch Tower Society in Vienna were sold, and Walter Voigt, the local manager, fled to Switzerland. August Kraft then assumed the lead of the Austrian branch. In the *Abschlussvermerk der Gestapo Wien über die Führer der Bibelforschervereinigung in der Ostmark* [Closure statement of the Gestapo in Vienna on the leaders of the Bible Students Association in the Ostmark] of 17 December 1941 one reads:



August Kraft

*"After the reunification of Austria and the German Reich, the leaders of the illegal Bible Students organization fled from the Ostmark either to Switzerland or to England. August Kraft, the substitute, took over the lead [...]. The Bible Students, i.e., 'Jehovah's Witnesses,' now performed their activities more carefully. They only met in small groups, sometimes in private homes, sometimes in public parks, to 'interpret' the Bible and read the Bible Students' literature together. These documents generally contained the lead articles of the Bible Students' publications which were forbidden in the German Reich. August Kraft had them duplicated and delivered to the majority of the confessors through middlemen."<sup>83</sup>*

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83 Neugebauer, "Ernste Bibelforscher", 166.

Kraft was always underway, acted as courier himself and oversaw groups of Bible Students in Innsbruck, Klagenfurt and in other areas of the country. Initially, it was also Kraft who received the editions of the Watchtower, which were smuggled in from Switzerland, in Vorarlberg and then distributed to others.

In Vienna, Kraft organized the duplication of literature and was also involved in the process himself, as the interrogation records of Ernst Bojanowski show:

*"On 1 June 1938, copies of the WT were produced in Vienna. Prior to this, the originals were distributed. Kraft himself still organized the production. During Kraft's time, he himself wrote the stencils while Resi Schreiber (detained in Vienna) produced the prints."*<sup>84</sup>

Until 1939 the copying machine and typewriter were buried in a camouflaged hiding place in the 19th district. On 25 May 1939, August Kraft was arrested by the Gestapo at his apartment. On 14 July 1939, he was sent to the Dachau concentration camp on account of a protective custody order. He never received a trial. After 6 months, Kraft was transported to Mauthausen along with 144 other Jehovah's Witnesses in the large transport of prisoners in September 1939 and was admitted there on 29 September 1939. His fellow believer, Alois Moser, recalls:

*"One day, August Kraft pointed out to the commander of the concentration camp that there were some blood stains on his vest. The commander ordered him to be sent to solitary confinement. The next morning Josef Buchner and I had to pile the naked dead bodies on a sled. All the wretched men had a tag indicating their name tied to their big toe. August Kraft was one of those on the heap of bodies."*<sup>85</sup>

Josef Buchner from Braunau also reports about him:

*"Brother Kraft, who had always supplied us with the Watchtower magazines during the ban, died in this nightmarish place. Only a few hours before his death I was able to speak to him. Tears just streaming from my eyes, I told him that soon he would be with his heavenly father and His son. Smiling and with a faint voice he answered that he was happy to be able to die. The next day his body was among those we heaped onto the sled."*<sup>86</sup>

August Kraft died in the Mauthausen concentration camp on 1 February 1940.

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84 Neugebauer, „Ernste Bibelforscher“, 164.

85 LS Moser.

86 LS Buchner.

## 4.3 Heinrich Lutterbach

8 years and 5 months in prison and the concentration camp

Heinrich Lutterbach was born on 30 July 1909 in Munich. He first came in touch with Jehovah's Witnesses around the year 1930. It was in that year that the film and slide presentation of the *Photo-Drama of Creation* was first shown in Munich. It was accompanied by the music of a small orchestra under the lead of Erich Frost, a professional musician. The 21-year-old violin virtuoso Heinrich was invited to become a member of the orchestra. As of 1932, he took the lead and travelled around showing the Photo-Drama throughout Germany until the Nazis assumed power. Afterwards he presided the illegal evangelizing work of a group of 9 Jehovah's Witnesses in Regensburg. The group must have been denounced by someone because on 19 September 1936 all nine of them were arrested and then sentenced to 10 months of prison by a court of lay assessors in Regensburg on 26 November 1936. Their sentence read:

*"All of the accused proclaim unanimously to be bound primarily to the laws of Jehovah according to the words of the Bible 'We must obey God [...] rather than men.' Hence the laws and orders of the government are only respected and complied with as long as they do not conflict with Jehovah's commandments. [...] Despite his youth, Lutterbach Heinrich has also very zealously stood up for the ideas of the Earnest Bible Students and, whenever he resided in Regensburg, very actively supported the Association of Earnest Bible Students there. Making the offence even more serious, it must be pointed out in his case that he, as a young national comrade liable to military service, refuses to serve in the military and thus has expressed being completely unaware of the patriotic duties demanded from every German."<sup>87</sup>*



Heinrich Lutterbach

With the aim of destroying Heinrich's professional musical career, the Berlin Reichsmusikkammer [Reich Chamber of Music] was also informed of the judgment. He served his sentences in the prison of Landsberg/Lech.

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87 JW-G/HA, Judgment Regensburg, 27 Nov. 1936.

On 18 March 1937, he was transferred to the Dachau concentration camp and became inmate number 12686. At first, he was put in the penal colony, which meant seven days of the hardest labor doing earthworks and concrete work as well as work in the gravel pit. In 1938, he and 8 other Jehovah's Witnesses were transferred to St. Gilgen/Wolfgangsee for 23 days. The prisoners were deployed in the preparation of the premises for the construction of SS-Oberführer Hans Loritz's mansion. They were accommodated in a nearby prison.<sup>88</sup>

Lutterbach was one of a group of 144 Jehovah's Witnesses to be transferred to the Mauthausen concentration camp on 29 September 1939. There he had to work in the quarries and build the Gusen camp. In 1941 he was transferred to the Gusen concentration camp, where he became the leader of the camp orchestra. Hans Maršalek mentions this in his book *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen* [The History of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp]:

*"Heinrich Lutterbach, a Bible Student from Munich with inmate number 46409, assumed the lead of the Gusen orchestra with a special devotion. Lutterbach, a passionate musician, came to the camp at the end of 1941. In 1942, the SS entrusted him with the lead of the orchestra."*<sup>89</sup>

Lutterbach was also assigned to be the second camp clerk in Gusen. He used this position to copy religious literature illegally smuggled into the camp. He reports:

*"As a camp clerk I had the chance to move around relatively freely and in part also unattended. This was possible because sometimes I worked night shifts compiling the transport lists. To do so, I went to the crematorium repeatedly, and while the bodies of executed prisoners were burned, I made copies the WT [Watchtower] issues on the typewriter. This took place with the consent of the other prisoners working there."*<sup>90</sup>

One day, while he was copying some literature during taytime, he was almost detected but managed to pull the page out of the typewriter and hide it just in time. Had he been found out, it could have meant his death.

On 5 May 1945, the day of liberation, Heinrich Lutterbach was in the office in Gusen together with Karl Krause, a fellow believer, and the first camp clerk, Mr. Jahnke from Berlin, when the turmoil erupted. Lutterbach remembers how Jahnke, out of fear of

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88 Cf. Klein, *Jehovas Zeugen im KZ Dachau*, 94-95.

89 Maršalek, *Mauthausen*, 380.

90 LS Lutterbach

acts of revenge from fellow prisoners, prepared to flee: *“He opened the door an inch to peer out, but already the others had grabbed him. A short outcry was heard, and he was trampled on by the raging hordes of people.”*<sup>91</sup>

Lutterbach and Krause had been warned of the mob by a prominent Polish prisoner: *“In confidence, Heini, go back to your block, the crowds are unpredictable in their rage!”* Both of them were able to reach their block unscathed.

Heinrich returned to Munich and married Josephine in 1947. The couple dedicated themselves to reorganizing the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Munich area. Lutterbach worked as an insurance salesman, but music and his religion continued to play a major role in his life. At the first international convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Nuremberg held on the Zeppelinwiese, he directed the assembly orchestra. He died on 21 August 1985 in Munich at the age of 75. He is remembered as a cheerful and approachable person who loved children.

## 4.4 Hedwig Tessarzik

Imprisoned for 7 years and 11 months in prison and the concentration camp

Hedwig Tessarzik<sup>92</sup> was born on 20 March 1899. She married Rudolf Tessarzik, born on 18 March 1894, and they had three children. The family lived in Lötzen, East Prussia (today: Russia). It is not known when they became Jehovah’s Witnesses. Hedwig was a housewife, her husband the chief secretary of the post office. Due to his religious affiliation as a Jehovah’s Witness, he eventually lost his job and the benefits granted to civil servants. Rudolf Tessarzik was imprisoned from 1937 to 1941. He was declared unfit for military service and deprived of his civil rights. After the arrest of their parents in 1937, the three minor children – Dagmar, Astrid



**Hedwig Tessarzik**

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91 LS Lutterbach.

92 Information JW-G/HA.

and Lothar – were placed in different families until their father was released from prison in 1941.

Hedwig was arrested in Lötzen on 11 June 1937 and then sentenced to four years of prison by a special court in Königsberg (since 1946 Kaliningrad). Because she refused to renounce her religious convictions, she was put in protective custody after the end of her detention and transferred to the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. As inmate number 7123 she had to perform forced labor there from 8 December 1941 until 22 March 1944.

On 24 March 1944 she and fourteen other Jehovah's Witnesses were transferred to the subcamp Schloss Mittersill located in what is today the province of Salzburg. Nine of these women were transported further to Schloss Lannach in Styria within a few days, while Hedwig remained in Mittersill together with four others. Hedwig was ordered to perform different kinds of work, most likely cleaning jobs. On 8 May 1945, the six women were freed by American troops and brought to the Mauthausen concentration camp, where Hedwig had to endure terrible conditions. Evidently, she returned to Schloss Mittersill afterwards, for she signed a questionnaire of her religious community with "Schloss Mittersill, 7 December 1945." So far it is unknown when she returned home.

## 4.5 Otilie (Otylia) Weber

Imprisoned for 2 years and 11 months in prison and concentration camps

Otilie Weber<sup>93</sup> was born on 17 April 1911, in Bleszno near Czestochowa. She was unmarried and lived with her parents at Czarny-Las no. 44 (until 1945 Schwarzwaldau [Czarny Bor], Silesia; Poland). Her activities as a Jehovah's Witness led to her being arrested in Czarny on 17 June 1942.

After being in pretrial detention in Lublin prison, she was deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp (inmate no. 18962) on 4 September 1942. On 22 March 1944, she was transferred to the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp, where she received inmate number 28086. On 24 March 1944, she and 14 other Jehovah's Witnesses were brought to the Schloss Mittersill subcamp in the province of Salzburg. Already within the next few days, 9 women were transported further to Schloss

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93 Information JW-G/HA and JW-P/HA.

Lannach in Styria. Otilie was ordered to do different kinds of work, presumably cleaning jobs. On 8 May 1945, the 6 women were liberated by the American troops and taken to the Mauthausen concentration camp, where they had to endure horrible conditions. Apparently, Otilie returned to Schloss Mittersill and continued working there for a while as a cleaner. She signed a questionnaire from the religious community with “Schloss Mittersill, 7 December 1945”.



**Otilie Weber**

Moreover, the following letter written home to her family in Polish and dated with “Schloss Mittersill, 24 February 1946” has been preserved. It shows that she was in touch with Jehovah’s Witnesses from Salzburg.

*“Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

*Schloss Mittersill, 24 Feb. 1946*

*Loving greetings from the high alps, where I’ve already been for 2 years now. I clean the rooms of an old castle, far away in the mountains close to the Italian border. I’m healthy – also spiritually. I’m doing well here, but I would really like to know how you, my dear ones, are doing at the moment and whether my sisters, with whom I shared happy and sad moments in Auschwitz for 17 months, have returned home safe and sound. Brother E. wrote telling me that you’ve already got your old job back. That makes me so happy. The sisters from Salzburg have also visited me several times. I send you a cordial handshake and hope to hear from all of you soon with good news!*

*Your Otylia Weber*

*Schloss Mittersill, Pinzgau, district of Zell am See, province of Salzburg, Austria”*

Eventually, she returned to her home, married and was then called Otilie Kukula.

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Photo on the back cover: Commemorative plaque at the Mauthausen memorial

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## Changes compared to the original German version from 2009

Based on current findings from historical research, the following casualty figures and notes have been updated:

Front cover: About 460 (450 in German version) Jehovah's Witnesses from all over Europe were interned in the Mauthausen concentration camp and its subcamps.

Page 10: According to the current state of research done by the Historical Archives of Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria, there were approximately 460 (450 in German version) Jehovah's Witnesses, most of whom came from Germany and Austria, in the main camp and the subcamps.

Page 12: In total, approximately 110 (exclusively male) (140 in German version) Jehovah's Witnesses lost their lives in Mauthausen. The death rate peaked in the winter of 1939/1940 at 53.

Page 29: Jehovah's Witnesses in the Gusen concentration camp (Mauthausen concentration camp in German version) after the liberation.

### Imprint

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**Even under the most extreme conditions, Jehovah's Witnesses remained loyal to their Bible-based principles and acted in harmony with their conscience. This is what enabled them to muster up the necessary strength for non-violent resistance to the Nazi regime and to keep their integrity.**



 JEHOVAS ZEUGEN

WAREN IN DIESEM LAGER OPFER EINER  
MENSCHENVERACHTENDEN TERRORHERRSCHAFT  
SIE LITTEN UND STARBEN FÜR IHRE TIEFE  
CHRISTLICHE ÜBERZEUGUNG

FÜR ALLES BIN ICH STARK DURCH DEN  
DER MIR KRAFT VERLEIHT  
PHILIPPER 4:13

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES  
WERE VICTIMS OF AN  
INHUMAN REIGN OF TERROR  
IN THIS CAMP. THEY SUFFERED  
AND DIED FOR THEIR FIRM  
CHRISTIAN CONVICTION.

FOR ALL THINGS I HAVE THE  
STRENGTH THROUGH THE ONE  
WHO GIVES ME POWER.  
PHILIPPIANS 4:13